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## Tolerance of Limits

According to Voltaire, "Tolerance is a law of nature stamped on the heart of all men."

Nothing could be truer than this statement; tolerance is, indeed, a permanent law of nature. But it is not something which has to be externally imposed, for the human desire for tolerance is limitless. Just as truth and honesty are virtues, so is tolerance a virtue. And just as no one ever needs to ask for how long one should remain truthful and honest, so does one think of tolerance as having an eternal value. The way of tolerance should be unquestioningly adopted at all times as possessing superior merit.

A man who is intolerant is not a human being in the full sense of the expression. To become enraged at antagonism is surely a sign of weakness. Of course, there are many who do not want to recognise the principle of tolerance as being eternal, for, in conditions of adversity, the temptation to retaliate becomes too strong. The feelings of anger which accompany negative reaction must somehow be vented, and those who think and act in this way are keen to retain the illusion that, in hitting back, they are not doing anything unlawful.

Such thinking is quite wrong. In reality, when a man is enraged at anything which goes against his will, tolerance as a priority becomes paramount. Many men strive to become supermen. But the true superman is one who, in really trying situations, can demonstrate his super-tolerance. Just any act of antagonism does not give us the license to be intolerant. Rather, such occasions call for greater tolerance than in normal circumstances. In everyday matter, where there is none of the stress and strain of opposition, no one has difficulty in being tolerant. It is only in extraordinary situations, fraught with conflict, that the truly tolerant man will prove his mettle.

On January 1st, 1995, the United Nations proclaimed 1995 as the "Year of Tolerance," saying that the ability to be tolerant of the actions, beliefs and opinions of others is a major factor in promoting world peace. The statement issued by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, (UNESCO) on this occasion, emphasizes that amidst the resurgence of ethnic conflicts, discrimination against minorities and xenophobia directed against refugees and asylum-seekers, tolerance is the only way forward. It pointed out that racism and religious fanaticism in many countries had led to many forms of discrimination and the intimidation of those who held contrary views. Violence against and intimidation of authors, journalists and others who exercise their freedom of expression, were also on the increase along with political movements which seek to make particular groups responsible for social ills such as crime and unemployment. Intolerance is one of the greatest challenges we face on the threshold to the 21st century, said the UNESCO Statement. Intolerance is both an ethnic and political problem. It is a rejection of the differences between individuals and between cultures. When intolerance becomes organised or institutionalised, it destroys democratic principles and poses a threat to world peace. (*The Hindustan Times*, January 1, 1995)

This proclamation of the U.N. is most apt and timely. The prime need of the world today is indeed tolerance.

One of the stark realities of life is that divergence of views does exist between man and man, and that it impinges at all levels. Be it at the level of a family or a society, a community or a country, differences are bound to exist everywhere. Now the question is how best unity can be forged or harmony brought about in the face of human differences.

Some people hold that the removal of all differences is the sine quanon for bringing about unity. But, this view is untenable, for the simple reason that, it is not practicable. You may not like the thorns which essentially accompany roses, but it is not possible for you to pluck out all the thorns and destroy them completely. For, if you pluck out one, another will grow in its place. Even if you run a bulldozer over all rosebushes, new plants will grow in their place bearing roses which are ineluctably accompanied by thorns. In the present scheme of things, roses can be had only by tolerating the existence of thorns. Similarly, a peaceful society can be created only by creating and fostering the spirit of tolerance towards diversities. In this world, unity is achievable only by learning to unite *in spite of differences*, rather than insisting on unity without differences. For total eradication of differences is an impossibility. The secret of attaining peace in life is tolerance of disturbance of the peace.

There is nothing wrong in diversity of opinions. In fact, this is a positive quality which has many advantages. The beauty of the garden of life is actually enhanced if the flower of unity is accompanied by the thorn of diversity.

An advantage flowing from this attitude is that it builds character. If you are well-mannered towards those whose views are similar to yours, you may be said to exhibit a fairly good character. But, if you behave properly with those holding divergent views from you or who criticize you, then you deserve to be credited with having an excellent character.

In the same way, a society whose members hold identical views and never have any controversial discussions, will soon find itself in the doldrums. The intellectual development of the members of this society will be frozen, because personal evolution takes place only where the interaction of divergent thinking provides the requisite mental stimuli.

The adoption of a policy of tolerance in the midst of controversy and in the face of opposition is not a negative step. It is undoubtedly a positive course of action.

Divergence of views plays an important role in the development of the human psyche. It is only after running the intellectual gauntlet that a developed personality emerges. If, in a human society, this process ceases to operate, the development of character will come to a standstill.

Nobody in this world is perfect. If a man is endowed with some good qualities, he may be lacking in others. This is one of the reasons for differences cropping up between people. But, for life as a whole, this disparateness is actually a great blessing; the good points of one man may compensate for the shortcomings of another, just as one set of talents in one man may complement a different set in

another. If people could only learn to tolerate others' differences, their very forbearance would become a great enabling factor in collective human development.

After 1947, when the first government of independent India was formed, two important leaders were included in it. One was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and the other was Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel. Pandit Nehru's westernized ideas were in great contrast to the orientalism of Sardar Patel. And this caused frequent differences of opinion between these two leaders. But this proved to be a boon for the nation, because with Pandit Nehru's abilities compensating for the shortcomings of Sardar Patel, and vice versa, the end result was one of an efficacious complementarity. The above is a good example of the difference between the respective natures and opinions of individuals essential for human development in general.

The habit of tolerance prevents a man from wasting his time and talent on unnecessary matters. When negatively affected by another's unpalatable behaviour, your mental equilibrium is upset, whereas when emotionally untouched by such behaviour, your mind will fully retain its equilibrium and, without wasting a single moment, you will continue to carry out your duties in the normal way. The policy of tolerance or forbearance enhances your efficacy, while intolerant behaviour reduces it.

Tolerance is not an act of compulsion. It is a positive principle of life, expressing the noble side of a man's character. The existence of tolerant human beings in a society is just like the blooming of flowers in a garden.

## Islam: A Tolerant Religion

So far as Islam is concerned, it is an entirely tolerant religion. Islam desires peace to prevail in the world. The Qur'an calls the way of Islam 'the path of Peace' (5:16). The state of peace can never prevail in a society if a tolerant attitude is lacking in the people. Tolerance is the only basis for peace; in a society where tolerance is absent, peace likewise will be non-existent.

Peace is the religion of the universe. Peace should, therefore, be the religion of man too, so that, in the words of Bible, the will of the Lord may be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

In a similar vein, the Qur'an tells us that: "The sun is not allowed to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day. Each in its own orbit runs" (36:40).

When God created heaven and the earth, He so ordered things that each part might perform its function peacefully without clashing with any other part. For billions of years, therefore, the entire universe has been fulfilling its function in total harmony with His divine plan.

The universe is following this path of peace – which is known in science as the law of nature as it is imposed upon it by God, whereas man has to adopt this path of peace of his own free will. This has been expressed in the Qur'an in these words: "Are they seeking a religion other than God's, when every soul in heaven and earth has submitted to Him, willingly or by compulsion? To Him they shall all return" (3:83).

Peace is no external factor to be artificially imposed upon man. Peace is inherent in nature itself. The system of nature set up by God already rests on the basis of peace. If this system is not disrupted, it will continue to stay the course set for it by the Almighty. But the only way to keep humanity on the path of peace is to rid it of corruption. That is why the Qur'an enjoins: "And do not corrupt the land after it has been set in order" (7:85).

In order to preserve the peace, established by nature, from disruption, two important injunctions have been laid down by Islam. One, at the individual level, stresses the exercise of patience, and the other, at the social level, forbids taking the offensive.

1. Negative reaction on the part of the individual is the greatest factor responsible for disrupting peace in daily life. It repeatedly happens that in social life one experiences bitterness on account of others. On such occasions, if one reacts negatively, the matter will escalate to the point of a head-on collision. That is why Islam repeatedly enjoins us to tread the path of patience. The Qur'an says: Surely the patient will be paid their wages in full without measure (39: 10).

The reason for the rewards for patience being so great is that patience is the key factor in maintaining the desired system of God. In the words of the Qur'an the patient man is the helper of God (61:14).

2. The other injunction, designed to maintain peace in human society, forbids the waging of an offensive war. No one in Islam enjoys the right to wage war against another. There are no grounds on which this could be considered justifiable.

There is only one kind of war permitted in Islam and that is a defensive war. If a nation, by deviating from the principles of nature, wages war against another nation, defence in such circumstances, subject to certain conditions, is temporarily allowed.

To sum up, Islam is a religion of peace. The Arabic root of Islam, '*sil*m', means peace. The Qur'an says: '... and God calls to the home of peace' (10:25).

Peace is basic to all religions. Let us all strive then to establish peace in the world, for that is the bedrock on which all human progress rests.

## India Towards a Glorious and Invincible

In its editorial 'Neighbour's Neighbour', *The Times of India* (April 21, 95) wrote: "Though India is the second largest Islamic country in the world [recent estimates show that India's Muslim population is now the largest] it has been subjected to hostile propaganda in the Organization of the Islamic Countries. It is, therefore, necessary for India to cultivate leading Islamic countries and explain to them, the realities of the situation in the country. It is on record, for example, that although Mr. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad was deputed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi to attend the first meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Countries held in Morocco in 1969, this mission was not a success because of Pakistan's opposition to India."

It needs to be emphasized far beyond the borders of India, that in addition to constituting the largest Muslim population in the world, Indian Muslims have made extraordinary progress since 1947. Most Muslim families are now far better off than they were prior to that date. (For details, please refer to *Indian Muslims* by the author).

There can be no doubt that Muslims are a great asset to their country. When it comes to holding the banner of India high on the world Muslim map, they make a solid contribution. Our neighbour, Sri Lanka, having grasped this reality, has assigned its foreign ministry and many other important posts to Muslims. Sri Lanka is now benefiting greatly from the relations thus established with Muslim countries. I feel that India has yet to fully tap this precious opportunity.

Today the country is beset by serious problems to solve which new blood is required. And this new blood, according to the predictions of Swami Vivekananda, can be found among the Muslims. On June 19, 1898, he wrote:

I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islam body.

(*Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 380).

To put it quite plainly, this would mean having a Hindu president and a Muslim prime minister for our great democratic system. Today the formation of such a government has become an inescapable necessity. The Swami's dictum of one hundred years ago would appear to be an ideal proposal in terms of present circumstances. It is not just playing with ideas, it is rather making a cool assessment of the country's present condition. More than eighty percent of the problems faced by our country today relate directly or indirectly to Muslims. Would not an able and patriotic Muslim prime minister deal with them with greater insight and efficiency?

Let us look at what India's most serious problems are, given its central position in a huge chain of Muslim countries stretching to its east and west. The most difficult problem to be solved is that of

Kashmir. Then there is the normalization of relations with the west Asian countries, with whom innumerable matters of national interest are at issue. Other problems include securing the support of the Muslim members in the United Nations; the normalization of relations with Pakistan, which for us is of prime importance, the establishment of a corridor through Bangladesh to join northern India with the rest of the country by road or rail, and the formation of a federation of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as a permanent political solution to the problems of the subcontinent, besides the internal normalization of Hindu-Muslim relations, and so on.

Serious problems like these have become obstacles in the path of our progress. Our journey as a nation has reached a dead end. In such circumstances, an able Muslim prime minister may effectively lead the caravan of national progress out of its present state of impasse.

The number of Muslims in Malaysia is less than that of India (about 12 cores). Although the ratio of Muslims to adherents of other faiths is greater than in India. Malaysian Muslims are still numerically in a minority. Even so, for almost the last twenty years, Malaysia has had a Muslim prime minister in Maathir Mohammed. And this is without there being a Muslim majority in parliament. The number of Muslim members of parliament is actually less than fifty per cent, so that it is not a Muslim parliament which Maathir Mohammed heads, but a coalition government.

During a tour in Malaysia in July 1984, I had occasion to meet Maathir Mohammad and was able to form my own personal estimate of him. I came to the conclusion that the quality which has enabled him to head a coalition government for the last twenty years was the realism of his approach.

Unlike our Muslim leaders, he does not indulge in wishful thinking, but makes an in-depth study of circumstances and then makes plans of proven feasibility. It is this quality in him which is responsible for Malaysia's extraordinary progress. It is significant that even with a minority in the Assembly, he has been able to form a government for four successive terms.

Indian Muslims are generally regarded as the downtrodden objects of social and religious persecution. But to my way of thinking, if old attitudes could be shaken off, there should be nothing to prevent them playing the same role in this country as is played by Mr. Maathir Mohammad in Malaysia.

It would be ridiculous to suggest, of course, that a few articles published in the newspapers should suffice for a Muslim to be offered the post of prime minister. Prime ministership is not something to be lightly conferred on demand. The aspirant should first have to prove his mettle, and then the post should be given to him on the basis of outstanding personal merit. Swami Vivekananda meant just this when he made the above-mentioned observation. If meritorious Muslims go forward at the national level where, by virtue of their excellent performance in the country's mainstream, they come into public's eye, and emerge as national figures, they can certainly reach the highest political offices in the country.

For this to happen, Muslim intellectuals and leaders shall have to adopt a totally non-communal approach. They must concentrate on what is in the general interest of the nation and not just on the

welfare of their own community. They shall have to develop national thinking instead of sectarian thinking and should have the guts to say: "I am proud to be an Indian Muslim." Their approach must be secular in the best sense of the word, and, without differentiating between Hindus and Muslims, they must show their love for all Indians in equal measure.

While in Kuala Lumpur, I said my prayers at the official residence of the Prime Minister. As a devout Muslim, Mr. Maathir Mohammad joined us. But when it comes to public life, he adopts an entirely secular approach, for, in a country with a diverse cultural and religious background, no system other than secularism is practically possible.

If a high-calibre secular, realistic, patriotic, nationally minded Muslim were to appear on the Indian political scene, and, most important, if his character remained unaffected by malign pressures, there is no doubt about that he would make an excellent choice of becoming prime minister of India. Had Kashmiri Muslims not waged a senseless separatist war in 1989, thereby discrediting themselves in the eyes of our countrymen, I am certain that the first Muslim prime minister of India could very well have been a Kashmiri.

Even today if the Kashmiris, severing all connections with the separatist movement, joined the mainstream they would astonishingly find that the India which proposed them the post of the Kashmiri Prime Minister was willing with great pride to offer them the post of the Prime Minister of India.



## A Silent Revolution

To a cross-section of educated, socially conscious Kashmiri Muslims (with whom I have had recent contacts), it is a matter of gravest concern that the violent *jihad*, unleashed in Kashmir in the name of freedom in 1989, not only failed in its objective, but caused the people of that country to suffer irreversible losses. More than fifty thousand people lost their lives, and all economic and educational institutions were destroyed. Peace seems to have vanished forever from Kashmir, and without peace, there can be no smooth functioning of day-to-day activities, nothing even approaching normality.

However, there is another aspect to this matter. Many Kashmiris have been forced by the pressure of circumstances to uproot their families and re-settle beyond the borders of their own land. At present, about fifty thousand Kashmiris are living in various Indian cities. These emigrant Kashmiris – hard workers, as emigrants tend to be – are fast becoming an affluent community, running prosperous businesses and owning big houses and Maruti cars. Their children, too, are receiving a proper education. For these Kashmiris, the change in their circumstances has turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It has revealed to them a reality which had not been apparent to them in Kashmir, namely, that despite the supposed tyranny inflicted on them and other political problems, there was still the genuine possibility of their thriving in India. This is a discovery which has brought about a total revolution in Kashmiri thinking. Now, deliberately detaching themselves from the so-called freedom struggle, they have successfully plunged into normal economic activity both in India and abroad.

Now – albeit at a later stage – they have realized that their progress had never depended upon the resolution of Kashmir's political problem, and that, as such, these problems have now become a secondary issue for them.

The same is true to a large extent and, of course, on a large scale, of Muslims in general. The fault lies with unwise Muslim leaders, who had enmeshed their followers in matters which bore no relation to reality, tyrannising them into thinking that the solution to all their problems lay in Pakistan. This explains why they remained blind to the great opportunities elsewhere, which were open to all and sundry after 1947. Their blinkered vision caused them to persist in seeing India as a "problem country"; unrealistically, they looked beyond its borders for a solution to their problems. This rationale did, however, crumble when, in 1971, Pakistan itself was dismembered as the result of a bloody war. Even this cataclysm brought about only a fifty percent shift in Muslim perspectives.

Since that time, it has taken repeated acts of violence in Karachi and other Pakistani cities – in the course of which emigrant Muslims were ruthlessly looted and murdered – to bring them to the realization that, except in India, there was no alternative place for them. It took all these years, all these dastardly events and all the dashing of their hopes to make them emerge from the state of ignorance into

which they had been plunged by yellow journalism and the fulminations of unwise leaders. Only then, after all this, did they discover that by seizing the golden opportunities offered them by India, and by working hard, they could be as resoundingly successful there as in former times in Kashmir. That is why, wherever one goes, one finds them prospering in business and acquiring the material symbols of wealth.

The same is also true, but in greater measure, of the Hindus. For the last fifty years, ill-informed and unwise Hindu leaders have been impressing it upon members of their community that Muslims pose a threat to them, and that so long as they tolerate their presence, avenues of Hindu progress will remain blocked. They insist, moreover, that Hindus erase all traces of the Muslim period, and that all possible steps be taken to ensure that Muslims remain as backward as possible. These leaders have even gone so far as to argue that unless the Muslims are crushed, Hindus will never make progress in their own country.

However, the fifty years of baneful activity which culminated in the demolition of the Babari Masjid on December 6, 1992, brought the Hindus a different kind of reward from what they had expected. After the Babari Masjid had been torn down, the riots that took place in different parts of the country caused losses amounting to ten thousand crore rupees – all these were losses which were borne by the Hindus. Where they had expected the automatic opening of doors to economic progress, they now found that this backlash had placed obstacles in their path.

These events, paradoxically, had the effect of causing both communities to arrive at the same conclusion. That is, both realized the futility of negativism, and, setting aside such thinking, re-engaged themselves in business and allied activities. The Hindus, too, found that not only did the presence of Muslims in the country do them no harm, but it actually proved to be a positive advantage. For instance, today, millions of Muslim craftsmen and workers are engaged in the manufacture of a variety of goods in many Indian cities. Hindus, for their part, supply them with the raw materials, then market the finished products within the country and abroad. In this way, Muslims have become an indispensable part of the Hindu economic machine. The Muslim in making one lakh rupees, gives the Hindu the opportunity to make one crore rupees.

This has demonstrated to Hindus that, by adjusting themselves to the 'Muslim problem' (as they see it) they remove all bars to their own advancement, albeit sharing the same territory. This has resulted in former staunch supporters of the plan to demolish the Babari Masjid turning against extremist leaders when they wanted to have a repetition of this incident in Kashi, on March 27, 1994, and in Mathura, on August 22, 1995. Ultimately, fanatical Hindu leaders, deprived of the necessary support, were forced to beat a retreat, leaving unfulfilled their plans for destruction.

The upshot is that a new India has emerged from the debris of the past, the common people having extricated themselves from the clutches of self-serving and incompetent leaders. They have learned that the secret of success in life lies not in groups clashing with each other, but rather in the avoidance of friction and in making full use of whatever opportunities present themselves for individual advancement.

This is a basic, intellectual volte face, which is clearly visible in the people. It is a transformation which has effectively altered the direction in which the country is moving. Now, the people, possibly more as a matter of instinct than of ratiocination, are forging ahead along positive lines. Once the country is well launched on this healthier course, such a revolution will necessarily produce two results: peace and prosperity – the pre-requisites for progress. The country is now poised to achieve these goals. Now, not even a horde of wrong-headed leaders should be able to deflect the nation from this path.

In normal circumstances the guidance of nature is sufficient to set mankind on the right course. But this will take place only if the lesson the public has learned about ignoring yellow journalism and the rantings of so-called leaders is a permanent one. At the moment, there are high hopes that the de-railing of the country over communal issues was only a temporary phase.

Again, the checks and balances lie in the system of nature itself. Each wrong course is righted by nature, because horrible consequences prove to be eye-openers to the people. In India, this eye-opening event has already taken place. Its reverberations had barely died down when our countrymen began to abandon the path chalked out by incompetent leaders in favour of the path of nature. This is a silent revolution – a revolution which holds out the greatest hope for the future of this country.

(220:4)

## Distinctive Quality

Islam, being a preserved religion, possesses the distinctive quality of being in perfect accord with human reason and human nature. No level of rational thinking and academic progress clashes with Islam. That is to say, at no stage do Islam and reason contradict one another. No believer is faced with the problem of accepting religious dogmas at the expense of science and reason.

Acknowledging this characteristics of Islam, George Bernard Shaw writes:

When the Mohammedan reformation took place, its followers with the enormous advantage of having the only established religion in the world, in whose articles of faith, any intelligent and educated person could believe.

It is due to this special characteristic of Islam that people have been regularly embracing Islam before as well as after the age of science. The modern educated mind finds no difficulty in accepting Islam. That is, the potential convert is not confronted with the difficult question of having to make a choice between Islam and reason. That is, he will not have to divide his mind into the artificial compartment, one for religion and one for science.

What George Bernard Shaw has termed an enormous advantage for the Muslims of the first phase, exists equally for the believers of today. But it is not being availed of. The only obstacle to this path is the general ill will existing at present between the *da'i* and the *mad'u*. Once this obstacle is removed, nothing can stop Islam from entering human settlements with the force of a mighty flood.

## Persian Influence on Indian Culture

Persian influence on Indian Culture is a vast subject with many sides to it. Here I should like to deal very briefly with just one aspect of it, that is, the role of Persian sayings and poetry on Indian society, and in particular their moral impact.

Last November on a return journey from Baroda to Delhi by a morning flight of Indian Airlines I happened to make the acquaintance of a fellow passenger, an elderly Hindu. He turned out to be Mr. Muchkund Dubey, formerly, of the Indian foreign service and now living in Delhi. As usual on such journeys, I had taken my pen out of my bag and had begun to write. Mr. Dubey asked, "Are you writing in Urdu or Persian?" I asked him whether he knew Persian. He replied in the affirmative and said that he had been to Iran. I asked him if he could quote some Persian saying from memory. He thereupon wrote down this saying of Shaikh Saadi: *Cheguna shukr nemat guzaram, ke mardum Azari nadarm.* (How can I ever thank God that I am bereft of all power to torment people.)

This small anecdote reminds us of a whole generation of literate Hindus and, Muslims who, in days gone by, were generally acquainted with Persian. Wise Persian sayings and couplets were always on people's lips, and were repeated in gatherings, just as happens today with English sayings.

Persian had been dominated in India for about 700 years before it was ousted by the English language, soon after the arrival of the British. This dominance was due to Persian being the language of all the Muslim conquerors who came to India, with the exception of Mohd. bin Qasim. Since, perforce, the public followed the example of the kings, Persian language and culture flourished.

The influence of this historical process can still be seen even today in different forms. For instance the words of greetings, like '*Khush Amded*' or the phrases used in parting like '*Khuda Hafiz*' are direct legacies of Persian culture.

During this period, Persian culture became so popular that people memorized innumerable sayings and couplets, which had the effect of strengthening and perpetuating Persian influence. This was to have both a cultural and moral impact on Indian society.

At this point, I should like to present certain sayings and couplets which illustrate our indebtedness to the Persian influence in reinforcing high moral values in India. I think you will find that these are self-explanatory.

1. Follow the right path, even if it is longer
2. Musk speaks for itself, not the salesman
3. Opt for a path and stick to it.

4. Food is for the sake of life, not life for the sake of food.
5. Richness is in the heart, not in wealth
6. One who digs wells for others, will find a well before him
7. Sometimes the best answer is not to give any answer
8. Kill the cat the very first day
9. Better late than never
10. Seeing is better than hearing
11. Seek and you will find
12. One quintal of knowledge requires ten quintals of wisdom
13. An elder is one who is wise, not one who is older
14. Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet.
15. Like for others what you like for yourself.
16. A hint suffices for a wise man
17. Drops of water make the river.

## Woman's Role in Islam

The Qur'an calls Islam a religion of nature. This is because Islam is, in actual fact, based on the laws of nature. The commands of the Qur'an are a direct expression of those laws which have operated in the world of nature since its creation.

The teachings of Islam regarding women are based on the same laws of nature. Acceptance of these laws is not akin to the acceptance of general human laws, where both acceptance and refusal are possible. The rejection of Islamic laws as regards women is actually a rejection of the laws of nature and by doing so, man can never successfully construct his life in the present world.

Study of the Qur'an and Hadith tells us that one of the laws of nature is that all the things in the world have been created in the form of pairs. The Qur'an states:

And all things We have made in pairs, so that you may give thought. (51:49)

The scientific study of the universe has further corroborated this law of nature. As discovered by science the primary unit of the universe, the atom, is composed of negative and positive particles. In the absence of any one of the two, the atom cannot come into existence and even trees have male and female characteristics. Just as human beings are born in the form of males and females, animals are likewise male and female. The whole world is said to exist in pairs. In this way, nature's entire factory has functioned all along on this dual basis.

The duality of existence shows that if anything in this world is to function properly, it must first recognize its true position and adhere strictly to the limits set for it by nature itself.

For instance, if the negative particles of atoms tried to change themselves into positive particles, or vice versa, the entire structure of the atom would be shattered. In a similar way, if men, animals and trees wanted a change in their position and particularly in the animal kingdom, if males and females opted for a change in their roles – the entire system of nature would be disrupted.

Islamic law regarding women is rooted in this system of nature. According to Islam, men and women are equal as regards honour and status, but physically and psychologically they are different. In order to maintain the system of nature between men and women socially, Islam advocates a division of labour, which entails separate workplaces. Islam stipulates that woman's workplace should basically be the home, vis-a-vis man's workplace in the outside world.

The system of the human world is divided into two departments of equal importance: one is represented by the 'home' and the other by the 'office.' Just as an office in this context is not confined by four walls but represents a centre of activity, similarly 'home' is not marked by a boundary, being also a complete practical centre of activity.

Under the division of Islam, man has been assigned to the 'office' so that he may successfully manage all departments external to the home. Similarly woman has been put in charge of the home so that she may successfully manage all domestic affairs. Both these tasks are of equal importance, neither being superior or inferior.

This system of nature has functioned successfully in the world for many thousands of years. With the emergence of western civilisation in modern times, it happened, for the first time, that in the name of equality an intensive effort was made, by declaring male and female to be identical and interchangeable, to repudiate it. But the 200-year experiment showed that this self-styled equality could not be established in any part of the world.

Many reports and surveys have come out in the western press in this connection. Here I would like to refer to a recent report concerning the USA, the most developed part of the world. This report was published in the December 94 issue of *Span* under the heading "Feminism's Identity Crisis":

Polls suggest that a majority of women hesitate to associate themselves with the feminist movement, not wanting to identify themselves as feminists... The polls also adumbrate unarticulated ambivalence about feminist ideals, particularly with respect to private life."

Feminism is a non-issue, says Ellen Levine, the editor in chief of *Redbook*. Women don't think about it. They don't talk about it. And they seem not to be particularly interested in politics. Feminism, however, is popularly deemed to represent the belief that men and women are equally capable of raising children and equally capable of waging war. Thus feminism represents, in the popular view, a rejection of femininity. According to a survey by *Redbook*, feminism has made it 'harder' for women to balance work and family life.

However, I would admit that just as western woman has failed to find her real position, being caught in the lure of unnatural freedom, similarly a woman in the present Muslim society has been largely denied rights that Islam has given her, for instance, a woman becoming a victim of a man's maltreatment or her failing to receive her share in her parent's property, and so on.

Now the question arises as to the solution to this problem. In my view the only solution to it lies in education. It is a fact that present-day Muslims, both men and women, have been lagging far behind in education. There was a time when, during the Abbasid period, (751-1258 A.D.) the highest point in Muslim culture, literacy was almost one hundred percent. Not only men but all women received the education prevalent at that time. It is at this point – the point of education – that we should begin a new Islamic life. If Muslims were to concentrate on this, and strive towards the goal of one hundred percent literacy, that alone would suffice to bring about their overall reformation. Once that goal was attained, all other problems could be set right. Intellectually as well as practically, the Muslims would become a developed community. Ellen Levine believes that wage-earning mothers still tend to feel guilty about not being with their children and to worry that "the more women get ahead professionally, the more children will fall back."



With the efforts of Sir Sayyed and his colleague, Maulvie Samiullah, an educational movement was certainly launched among Muslims. However, due to certain shortcomings, this movement could not be a success in the full sense of the word. First, Muslims set a university as the target for their educational struggle. But when this university came into being, the hard reality dawned upon them that most students were not qualified for admission. The solution was sought in the form of reservations, which, ironically, only compounded the problem. With "reservation," all candidates, whether or not they qualified, had to be granted admission. And as a result, the Muslim university ultimately came to be a factory turning out people who had degrees but with no real qualifications.

This concept of the Muslim educational institution has clearly proved inadequate, if not actually counterproductive, and it will continue to be so until education is placed at the forefront. There can be no compromise with high standards; the principle of reservation and concessions must be shunned. Only those students who are truly qualified should find a place in the university. And, at the same time, Muslims should be encouraged to enter into all educational institutions, whether run by Muslims, Hindus or Christians.

The proper way for Muslims to achieve progress is to set the goal of education for its own sake. Literacy, the acquisition of basic general knowledge, and some experience with problem-solving have an intrinsic value for the individual and for society that is hard to overestimate. Universal primary education was wisely made a solemn directive in the Constitution of independent India forty-eight years ago. The fact that half of our population of 800 millions-plus is still denied this elementary human right is a major source of the problems our various communities face today. What Muslims need today more than a Muslim university is Muslim schools. It is a matter of the greatest urgency that an appropriate number of standard schools at the primary and secondary level be opened in every settlement.

Women can play a great role in this campaign for education. For instance, educated women can coach their children at home. The literate woman's ability to read to her young children, and the example she sets in her own quest for knowledge are the most powerful stimuli in their educational progress. Furthermore, women can be better teachers than men as far teaching children is concerned. For women this will not amount to a change of workplace, but will simply be an extension of the home, a broadening of the practical activity centered on child-rearing assigned to her by nature.

By playing this role effectively, Muslim women can prepare the next generation, which is the greatest need of the hour. In this way, they will hasten the time when an entire generation will be equipped with standard education. They would then have every opportunity to receive education in the higher institutions of their choice, and would be more certain of finding productive employment thereafter.

(Farida Khanam)

## World Religions and the Spirit of Tolerance

In its declaration the United Nations held the year 1995 as the year of tolerance. Now we have come close to the end of the year. Tolerance is a permanent human requirement. In this respect the subject of today's discussion is very important.

All the great religions of the world can be broadly divided into two categories: Aryan religions and semitic religions. So far as I have studied I have found that tolerance has been given equal importance in both these types of religions. Religion makes a man a spiritually developed human being. One who has elevated his spirituality can not afford intolerance. The behaviour of a truly religious person is always one of tolerance.

So far as I have studied the difference between the two types of religions is that of rationale of tolerance instead of tolerance itself. The philosophic ground of tolerance in the Aryan religions is derived from their belief that truth is an all-pervading reality. According to this concept, the psychology of a religious person is that 'If I am in the right, you too, according to your own tradition are in the right.' That is to say, tolerance in Aryan religions is based on the concept of manyness of reality.

The philosophic base of tolerance in Semitic religions is different from this, as these religions believe in the principle of oneness of reality. However, so far as the question of human respect is concerned, Semitic religions lay equal emphasis on this value. That is to say, the difference in this respect in both the branches of religions is one of philosophy not of practice.

To put it differently the basis of tolerance in Aryan religions is on mutual recognition, while its basis in semitic religions is on mutual respect. This difference is only one of philosophic explanation. So far as practical behaviour is concerned, there is no difference in either religions in this respect.

To sum it up, the spirit of tolerance is the essence of all religions. The man produced by religion can never be divested of the spirit of tolerance. Intolerance appears to be directed at others, but it is akin to killing man's own religious personality. Then how can a sincere person be willing to kill himself by his own hands.

## Creating Harmony Amidst Cultural Conflict

There is no denying the fact that cultural conflict does exist in reality. However, this is a blessing in disguise. Conflict between different cultures has always existed in human history. The only thing new about this phenomena in our times is that the modern means of communication have greatly accelerated the pace of this process.

The second point I should like to make is that cultural conflict per se poses no danger. It rather denotes a healthy process. Arnold Toynbee's theory that challenges act as a spur to take the nations forward, applies to cultural conflict too. Challenges in fact are the only ladder to the ongoing progressive journey of human history.

In ancient time, the confrontation of Roman and non-Roman culture resulted in the emergence of Muslim nations, bringing the history forward. Afterwards, Muslim and non-Muslim culture, came into conflict resulting in the emergence of renaissance in Europe. History further moved forward.

In the twentieth century European and non-European cultures faced challenges. As a result of which the USA emerged on the scene with the greatest of progress ever made in history.

However this is in no way the final phase in human history. Now the collision is taking place between American and non-American culture which would result in a better, more advanced culture, and it is quite possible that this might be Indian or Asian culture.

The actual task to be performed by India and other underdeveloped countries is not to engage themselves in protest against the so-called cultural invasions. What is more important for us is to devote our attention to educating our people. Increasing the percentage of literacy among the people amounts to making them an aware, enlightened people. Once we have managed to make them an enlightened people, it is quite possible that those who are lagging behind today may become pioneers of a new cultural age, as has often taken place in history.

### Hastening to pray in times of difficulty

It was the time of the Battle of the Trench, and, according to Hudhayfah, there were three hundred Muslims under siege. Recalling what a hard night it was, he recounts how they were surrounded by Abu Sufyan's army on one side and the Banu Qurayzah on the other, both posing a threat to the safety of the Muslim families. "The cold was already quite intense and, when a storm blew up, there was thunder and lightning everywhere and stones hurtling and crashing in the wind. It was almost impossible to see anything. Just then the Prophet came and asked to cross the trench and penetrate the enemy camp to collect information. It was essential to know if they were planning to prolong the siege or return to Mecca. I was the most timid of men and was extremely sensitive to the cold. Still, on receiving the Prophet's command, I immediately arose, he prayed for my safety, and I set off. I went hither and thither in Abu Sufyan's camp and was able to bring back the news that they were discussing plans to leave. On my return, I found the Prophet covered in his sheet, praying. Whenever the Prophet was confronted with some arduous task, he would begin to pray."

*(Al-Bid'ayah wa'n-Nihayah)*

## The Message of Pilgrimage

Prior to 1982, my knowledge of *haji* (pilgrimage to Mecca) had been limited to what I could gain from books, and so, when at last in that year I had the privilege of performing this religious duty I felt myself singularly blessed. Although the rites of *haji* are spread over only a few days, as symbolic guidelines they stand a man in good stead for the rest of his life. The message of *haji*, as I now comprehend it from the study and performance of it, is that man should make the Almighty the very pivot of his existence, hastening at His call to do His every bidding.

When a man leaves his home and country to go on such a pilgrimage, he brims over with all the emotions aroused by the thought that he is embarking on a course which will lead him directly to God. He is, in effect, sloughing off his own world, leaving it behind him, and reaching out for the world of the Almighty. He is on his way to the House of God, a place where the great deeds of God's messengers and his followers have been preserved for all eternity; where we find the hallowed impressions of the lives of those who lived and died for the cause of God. The *haji* is then filled with the realization that he is bound for that very destination which God has specially chosen for His Last Revelation. Once launched on this course, the pilgrim is imbued with the awareness of God and His truths, as well as the feeling that it is imperative that he become God oriented. If, up till then, he had been self-centered in his thinking, he now turns his thoughts to God, and his entire behaviour is moulded and transformed by these new thought processes.

Once the pilgrim's train of thought has become God oriented, he begins to ponder over major issues: God's act of creation, particularly His creation of himself. His affording him diverse opportunities of bettering himself in this world, His very benevolence which makes it possible for him to set forth on this journey to the House of God. The pilgrim also gives his mind to the day when he will meet his death and be summoned to the court of God. This trend of thought turns the ostensible physical journey of the pilgrim into an intense, spiritual venture.

When the time nears for his entrance into the *haram* (sacred territory), every pilgrim divests of his clothing in order to don a new kind of 'uniform' – an unstitched, plain, white garment which serves to heighten his consciousness of entering a new world. The very act of shedding his normal clothes (and with them all signs of status and ethnicity) signifies that he is separating himself from the way of life peculiar to his environment, and is now ready to become suffused with such emotions as are desired by God. In this way, thousands of men, in casting off their own hues, take on the hue of the Almighty. After clothing himself in *ihram* (godly raiment), the pilgrim finds his tongue of itself beginning to utter godly words- '*Labbayk! Labbayk!*—and he continues, as if hastening to answer God's call, to repeat the word '*labbayk*'- "*Oh God, I am here, I have come!*"

*Labbayk* (I am here) does not mean just that the pilgrim has come to stay in Mecca. It means that in leaving his normal abode, he has cast aside his whole way of life. It means, 'I am here, at Your command, and, with all my heart and soul, I am ready to obey You.' While on their pilgrimage, pilgrims simply give utterance to the word *labbayk*, but when they return to their own countries, they must put it into practice in their everyday lives.

On reaching Mecca, the pilgrim must perform *tawaf* (circumambulation). To do this, he enters the House of God (*Baitullah*), the great mosque in whose spacious central courtyard stands the *Ka'bah*, which was erected by the Prophet Abraham in ancient times. Then he goes round the *Ka'bah* seven times to demonstrate his willingness to make God the pivot of his whole existence.

After the *tawaf*, there comes the ritual of *sa' i*, which entails brisk walking from the hill of Safa to the hill of Marwa and back again. This procedure is repeated seven times in symbolic enactment of a promise, or covenant, to expend all of one's energies in the path of God. The form which this ritual takes, can be traced back to the Prophet Abraham's wife, Hajar, running from one hill to another in a frantic search for water for her young baby when they first arrived there.

The most important period of worship during *hajj* is the day-long sojourn on the plain of Arafat. It is, indeed, an awesome spectacle, with people from all over the world, clad in identical, simple, white garments, chanting, "Lord, I am present, Lord, I am present." This serves to impress upon the mind of the pilgrim how great a gathering there will be in the presence of God on the Last Day of Reckoning. Once he becomes aware of its true significance, all his problems fall into their true perspective, and his life cannot but take a turn for the better.

Another practice during *hajj* is the casting of stone at Jamrae-Uqba. This is a symbolic act through which the pilgrim renews his determination to drive Satan away from him. In this way, he makes it plain that his relationship with Satan is one of enmity and combat. The next step for the pilgrim is to turn his piece of symbolism into reality, so that he may be purged of all evils, for all the evils besetting man are there at the instigation of Satan.

After this, the pilgrim sacrifices an animal to God, an act symbolizing the sacrifice of the self. (This is referred to in the Qur'an as *sha'airullah-signs* of God). His faith is such that even if it comes to giving his life – the last thing that he would normally be ready to part with – he will not hesitate to do so in the service of God.

## ISLAM: CREATOR OF THE MODERN AGE

### A Review by Imani Muslim

Having read *God Arises*, a powerful treatise on the proofs of God in the Universe, by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, I was anxious if somewhat nervous to read his new work, *Islam: Creator of the Modern Age*. While I looked forward to delving into another of this writer's good books, my fear was that his latest work might not live, up to my expectations. I realized my fears were baseless by the time I had reached the second or third page. Maulana's scholarship again proves fascinating and his writing style infinitely readable.

The basic premise of *Islam: Creator of the Modern Age* is that without the advent of Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) and the final establishment of monotheism on the earth, none of what we take for granted in the modern world could possibly have developed. Quoting sources as diverse as Bertrand Russell and *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the Maulana takes us on a trip through history and around the world. He deftly presents his facts until we reach the conclusion that without monotheism the concepts of experimentation and scientific enquiry, not to mention modern industrialization, would not exist.

Take for example the ancient Greeks. Their society was steeped in polytheism and superstition. Many natural phenomena were believed to be endowed with godly powers. It was impossible to scientifically investigate something so revered. Consequently, people worshipped nature rather than explore it.

We tend to think of ancient Greece as a free thinking democracy. In fact this is not entirely true; only the upper classes were allowed any latitude; free speech and free thought were actively discouraged to protect the hold of the man-made religions over the populace. The Greek rulers like many others throughout time have used the polytheistic beliefs of their subjects to shore up their own power, claiming divine ancestors and the "divine right of kings".

The Maulana moves forward to modern day India where he points out that the attribution of divinity to the non-divine or the concept of *shirk* has had far reaching consequences. Dr. M.S. Swarninathan, former director of the Indian Agricultural Institute, New Delhi, blames "protein hunger" or lack of animal protein in the Hindu diet for the prospect of intellectual dwarfing of the nation's youngsters. Because people worship the cow, a food source, their children suffer from malnutrition while not necessarily going hungry.

In the chapter on Muslim contributions to science, the Maulana discusses areas as diverse as the solar system and historiography. In every case, the Islamic concept of the oneness of God, coupled with the teaching of man's role as God's vicegerent on earth have enabled the Muslims to investigate and harness

the earth's resources for the betterment of mankind as a whole. Far from worshipping things found in the heavens and on earth, Muslims have been able to look into the unexplained and take advantage of the things the Creator has given us to improve our lives.

In this book, the Maulana has once more made science and philosophy infinitely understandable. He draws on a wealth of sources to make his arguments. He presents Islam as it should be, as a religion of logic and reason, dazzling in its perfection and simplicity. One comes away with the feeling the Islam might just be the best kept secret in the western world.